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SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN COVERAGE LURCHES ALONG:

EGYPTIAN MEDIA THEMES, AUGUST 9 TO 14

REF: CAIRO 6133

**¶11. Summary:** The media devoted most of its leading coverage to the presidential nomination process. One independent newspaper continued to offer readers in-depth coverage of the candidates, publishing an informal poll on August 9 in which many of those interviewed claimed not to know the candidates or their platforms. President Mubarak received public backing from several religious organizations, while the leading opposition newspaper predicted that his government would "rig" the elections. The Egyptian-born biochemist Magdy Al-Nasher, a suspect in the July 7 London terrorist bombings, was released and spoke to the press outside his home on August 9, declaring his innocence. A planned emergency Arab League summit in Sharm El Sheikh was postponed, with rumors about why it was delayed Algerian anger toward Egypt, or perhaps the Egyptian presidential election? being explored in the pan-Arab and English-language press. End summary.

**¶12. Presidential elections:** The media continued to cover the issue of which presidential candidates would be allowed to run and which would be disqualified. Government-run Middle East News Agency (MENA) reported on August 11 that the Presidential Elections Committee had decided on the final list of candidates, while the pro-government media began to describe the presidential election as a "contest" or "battle." Several religious organizations publicly declared their support for President Mubarak on August 11, among them, Al-Azhar, the Ministry of Awqaf, and the Coptic Church. The Editor-in-chief of opposition newspaper Al-

Wafd (circulation: 50,000) predicted on August 9 that the Egyptian government would "rig" the elections, then accused the government in an August 11 commentary of "corruption and wasting the public's money." Al-Umma Party's presidential candidate, Ahmed Al-Sabahi, appeared on the popular Egyptian TV program Al-Bayt Baytak ("Make Yourself at Home") on August 13 to declare his campaign platform: the return of the tarbush (a.k.a. "fez," a head covering for men in style in Egypt during the monarchy) and the return of the "Darak" soldiers (a.k.a. "gendarme," police who were once stationed every 20 meters on Cairo's streets) to prevent terrorism. Independent daily Nahdet Masr (circulation: 20,000) continued to offer readers in-depth coverage of the candidates and elections (reftel), publishing the results of an informal study of Egyptians from all economic and social backgrounds on August 9. The majority of those polled claimed to know little about the candidates' platform, let alone who the candidates were. One candidate, quoted in the same issue of Nahdet Masr, appeared to sum up the spirit of several candidates when he declared, "I am running in these elections to win even if victory is impossible."

**¶13. London bombing suspect released:** The Interior Ministry announced August 9 that it had released Egyptian biochemist Magdy Al-Nasher, a suspect in the July 7 London terrorist bombings. Al-Nasher held a press conference outside his home the same day, acknowledging he knew two of the terrorists. Al-Nasher denied any link to the blasts and stated that his expertise and education "have nothing to do with explosions." Several independent dailies published news of his release and his photo on April 10, among them Nahdet Masr with the above-the-fold headline "Al-Nasher Innocent in London Bombings." Al-Nasher granted an exclusive interview to the independent weekly newspaper Al-Fagr (circulation: 50,000) on August 11 under the headline "Magdy Al-Nasher: I Learned Myself About Accusations in the London Bombing from International TV Networks." In the interview Al-Nasher claimed to have been interrogated three days straight until he proved his innocence to Egyptian authorities. Al-Nasher also appeared on Al-Bayt Baytak on August 13 to say that he planned to return to London and hoped that "the British people know I'm innocent and it was all a misunderstanding."

**¶14. Emergency Arab League summit postponed (indefinitely?):** Most Egyptians had to rely on the pan-Arab or English-language press for analysis about why the government postponed the emergency Arab League summit to have been held Sharm El Sheikh. The summit had been called for by the Egyptian government to discuss terrorism and other

regional issues, but was delayed in the wake of King Fahd's death. A headline in Saudi-owned Al-Watan on August 11 read: "Egyptian-Algerian Dispute Behind Postponing Summit." Saudi-owned Al-Hayat on August 11 quoted Amr Moussa and other government "sources" as claiming that King Fahd's death and the upcoming presidential elections were the reason. The Al-Hayat article also reported, "Sources also said that both the Algerian and Egyptian Presidents did not meet in Riyadh during King Fahd's funeral, which means that the dispute that occurred between the two countries regarding the decision to hold an Emergency Arab Summit still exists. This is why some Arab countries are suggesting not holding any emergency summit for the time being, as it will cause unneeded Arab divisions." Pro-government Al-Ahram Weekly (circulation: 25,000) reported the summit's postponement under the headline "Not Much of an Emergency" in its August 11-17 edition, noting that the summit's timing was "problematic" for most nations, thus its delay.

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